

"Yes, not a very good one. I try hard but it's nothing really."

"And what do you paint?" Christine noticed a hardness in the mother's voice. She frantically foraged for something concrete to say and felt the heat move over her in waves. "Colours," popped out before she could stop it.

"Colours?" repeated Steven's mother.

"Yes... all sorts." Christine felt like a child filling in the numbered drawings of a colouring-in book with garish pinks, and from their corner too far away to have heard her the men burst into great peals of laughter.

I turn and leave Mabel framed wide in judgement and run in a vain attempt to rid my mind of the local people gathered together in a tight thorny cluster at the dance; avoiding my gaze as if I am something over-ripe. But later my step slows as the black ocean on top of Bombay Hill swallows my solitude. From somewhere beyond the hill Jayant's sitar sings and I lie down in a paddock to listen and enter the cathedral of night. My arms are flung wide; my face opens to the stars and it happens. I hear the deep brickbat voices of the local men as they shine a light over my body. *So there you are, you bloody showoff. You lover of Indians. What's wrong with us, aye?* I struggle to my feet and the naked light catches my mouth open, but stripped of its sound. *Come on darling and loose your pretties for us boys, aye? We will teach you a thing or two.* Once again a hand moves to my wordless throat. Later, with legs strewn like two sticks in the wet grass it feels like death has come to nail up my mouth. Death so busy thatching a roof above my head.

The meat was done and the late afternoon feast was about to begin. Christine looked over at Steven. He was poking at the barbecue with a large fork; blazed across his apron were two large breasts and a sign that read, "I'm the little helper!" A plate of sausages piled up beside him like ammunition. He waved his fork at Christine and called anxiously, "Everything okay?"

"Fine," she replied and took a large gulp of red wine and with it a measure of bravado. She no longer cared what anyone thought about anything. The day seemed to have lost some of its humidity and a faint chill hung in the air so that the birds of paradise stood to attention, no longer lurching and rioting in their corner. She sat down in the circle of Steven's family and felt the need to talk, as if the wine had moistened a well of dryness in

her throat and the words gathered there needed to escape to the open air. Christine met the small pale eyes of Steven's mother and found the hint of a smile about the corners.

It's late afternoon and I am a petal on a breeze. My nostrils twitch in surprise at the myriad of scents and smells. There is the hot perfume of flowers the foul odour of the Bombay Pet Food Company, the warm smell of cow's breath and just a touch of garlic and curry spices. I take one last look at Bombay Hill. Some here have called me a witch. I can see the children, jumping up and down like little monkeys... "you're a witch, you old bitch!..." What if they could see me now, half way in between the earth and sky on an invisible broomstick... Wait, I see something on Ray's front lawn. It is unmistakable... the hint of gold, the frivolous rosettes, the swing of the crepe-de-chine and I laugh and cry deep like a river just to see it there as bold as the light of day.

The light quickly slipped away as Christine and Steven stood entwined in the centre of a paddock. Intoxicated, Christine let her body relax, puff out, pour into the folds of the dress. Steven slipped it over her shoulders and the crepe rustled like a forgotten moment of splendour as it fell to the ground. He whispered in her ear, "It wasn't so bad, was it? Meeting my mother?" She sighed and rested her head on his chest.

"At the beginning it was awful. I died little silent deaths all over the place like an incoherent drunkard. It felt as if someone had sewn up my mouth."

He stood back, "Why? They like you."

"I just felt uneasy. It was the dress. It's what you said in the car... about ethos. You were right."

Steven gave her a little push, then turned and walked quickly away from her; fully dressed. Christine fell backwards on to the grass; naked. His voice trailed harshly over his shoulder, "It's always the same with you. Everything has to entail suffering and it's always me who inflicts it. I didn't mean for you to take all that stuff in the car personally. It's a dress, for God's sake. The way you go on, you'd think that Christ was called Christine!"

Steven disappeared into the darkness. It was cold. Christine shivered and nestled into the dress on the ground. It felt like all the colour had drained from her body, taking with it the marrow from her bones. After a while she smiled. They had gotten wrong. It was wrong from the start. Christ was a fallen angel.